



# Collective Documenting of Extreme Urban Transformations: Evidence of urban resilience during the war in Sarajevo (1992-1996)

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**ABSTRACT** The aim of this paper is to analyse citizens' strategies for surviving dangerous wartime urban conditions in Sarajevo, as made evident through different documents—photos, videos, and architectural drawings—produced by many authors during and after the war. Heterogeneous in its materiality, this study relies on the personal and professional experiences of each citizen-author. It sketches the social and physical components of the city, at a time when the urban environment was made perilous due to bombing, and a lack of public transport, electricity, water, and food. In the period between 1992 and 1996 in Sarajevo and in other Bosnian cities, survival became the most important activity for citizens. The inability of the city and the people living in it to function normally demanded as they developed innovative surrogates for the everyday objects not available to them—invented objects for cooking, lightening their spaces, sleeping, and self-protection. Likewise, they developed alternate models of the safe transportation of goods, along with other urban functions. Their war documentation is extremely important, as Sarajevo's destruction, which quickly transformed the pre-war, compact city into the ruin—was and continues to be difficult to describe and represent. Using Sarajevo as case study, this article examines the importance of collective creation of documents about citizens' adaptation to extreme urban conditions as well as their contribution to the emerging studies on war architectural and urban resilience. Considering these documents is central to the formation and maintenance of a collective memory, as citizens undertake post-war reconstruction efforts, as artists develop materials for art projects on the urban wartime conditions, and as scholars craft academic research about the war across disciplines—architecture, urbanism, anthropology and media. This article takes media expressions as methodological tools for the reading and analysing war urban transformations and citizens' resilient efforts. The aim is for these studies to be used as well for other urban emergencies, such as crises due to natural disasters or the shrinking cities.

**KEYWORDS:** Collective documenting; war; media; Sarajevo; urban resilience; extreme urban transformations.

## Introduction

In the last war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1996), the capital city Sarajevo suffered an unprecedented siege, often noted as the longest siege in modern warfare. In the course of 1992 Serbian forces positioned their tanks on the hills around Sarajevo and snipers in tall



buildings located in the occupied Grbavica neighborhood of the city. In addition to the reports generated by local and international media operators, citizens were actively engaged in documenting the war and their methods for survival in the city. Due to the constant bombing and the aftereffects of such destruction, Sarajevo's wartime situation was extremely dangerous for the life of the citizens: they had to adapt to the living in destroyed flats, with UNHCR plastic foil on their windows instead of glass, lacking electricity, water, and food, and often sharing daily life among neighbours of the same building in their collective underground shelters. The city of Sarajevo was a battle terrain and its citizens were part of it all the time. Every day the city was hit by some 4000 shells on average; among the targets were hospitals, schools, mosques, churches, synagogues, maternity hospitals, libraries, museums, open-air and sheltered food markets, and any place where people stood in line for the limited supplies of food, bread and water (Bollens, 2001). Survival became the most important activity for all citizens, and “the city, although unsafe, became a survival resource itself” (Pilav, 2012). Due to these spatial-social conditions, many citizens felt an urgency to take risks in order to describe, document, and represent daily life during the siege. The siege of Sarajevo has been documented by many different authors, because every part of the city had witnesses of the war: non-specialists (citizens) who made amateur videos, diaries, photos, and fax correspondences, as well we specialists, such as architects, photographers, and film makers. In studying wartime urban transformations through the various materials, media, and data described above, I have learned that to comprehend and represent such an extreme urban condition demands an interdisciplinary approach to research that integrates documents made by many authors. I consider city of Sarajevo as the physical material of the research, while the documents made during the war are “cultural materials” (Simone, 2007; Ulmer, 1994) for the research. Documenting of the war using different tools and media products creates images of war. In addition referencing the mediums of these cultural materials (photos, videos, maps, comics, etc.), I will also use the –ing, or “gerund,” form of these terms, which acts as a noun<sup>1</sup> and represents action. Some of these gerunds already exist, such as mapping, but some of them are words constructions aiming to represent the **image making activity**, as it is comicing (the drawing of comics). I use these neologisms in order to demonstrate urban processes in which “activity and theory merge into one activity” (Ulmer, 1984). This paper analyses images that represent spatial and social urban resilience during the war, and contribute to the creation of the collective “forms of dialogical visual culture(s)” (Lovink, 2011), as well as spatial. I argue that these images have great importance as materials for collective memory, but also for academic research; post-war urban, architectural, and art projects; documentary and fiction films. Existing images of war and survival have a great impact on those who have no experience of war at all. Moreover,





one-hundred-twenty mortars, and innumerable anti-aircraft cannons, sniper rifles and other small arms.” (FAMA, 1993).

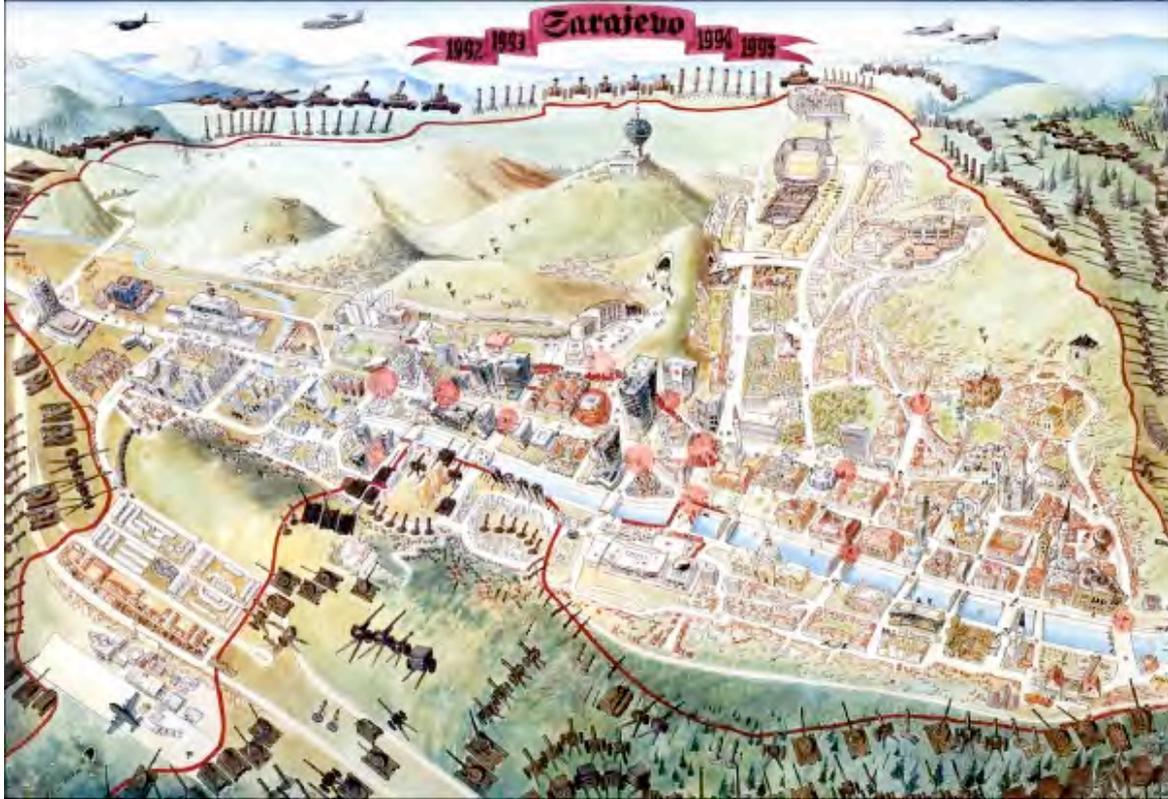


Fig. 1. Survival Map of Sarajevo, 1992–1996. Source: ©FAMA Collection.

As Sarajevo was under siege, certain morphological and topographic features of the urban territory and built environment became more or less conducive to urban warfare, and as such assumed different symbolic and practical significances than originally intended. One critical example: the frontline of urban warfare in Sarajevo divided certain neighbourhoods in two. This was the case in Grbavica and Dobrinja neighbourhoods, where the frontline was established in between and even *through* the buildings themselves.

### *Destructive Metamorphosis*

“And soon the form exhibits subtle change.”

Johann W. von Goethe, *Metamorphosis of Plants*, Goethe’s Works, vol. 1 (Poems), 1885.

The pre-war city was changing rapidly, due to two parallel extreme spatial action-reaction processes. First, the extreme spatial action: the bombing of the city from the surrounding mountains and hills as drawn in the Survival Map of Sarajevo (Fig. 1). This transformed very fast, due to constant bombing, the planned and compact city into a ruin (Fig. 2, 3), altering



its pre-war urban functions and architecture: public transport, pedestrian paths (Fig. 4), living interior spaces, modes for the provision of the food, and other changes. What followed was an extreme spatial reaction to the ruined and non-functioning city: citizens developed survival strategies, creating collaborative and resilient self-made city, altering urban production on the two vertically-divided levels: overground and underground level (Fig. 5). Some of these reactions included the following: creating urban gardens (Fig. 6), producing innovative objects for cooking, heating (Fig. 7), devising human-powered transportation of different items (Fig. 8), constructing protections against snipers and shelling (Fig. 9), developing new communication tools through the creation of video messages sent between families in embattled and peaceful areas, alternative interior lighting sources (Fig. 10). One particularly interesting wartime invention: a doorbell made using the bullet hole on the flat entrance door using the baby carion.<sup>5</sup> The need to survive introduced new architectural and urban elements—ephemeral and temporary—made by citizens who produced a space and “culture of collaboration,” based on trust and mutual understanding” (Lovink, 2011). In analyzing Doršner’s idea of destructive metamorphosis of the city, I have relied as well on the work of Johann W. Goethe, who dedicated his book *Metamorphosis of Plants* to metamorphosis in nature.<sup>6</sup> According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, metamorphosis is “a striking alteration in appearance, character, or circumstances.”<sup>7</sup> Goethe defines metamorphosis of plants as “the process by which one and the same organ appears in a variety of forms” (Millers, 2009). I have employed this term both as an analogy for the metamorphosis of the city during and after the siege.

**Fig. 2. (Left) and Fig. 3 (Right) Transition from a compact city to ruin due to wartime destruction. Photographs by Miguel Ruiz (Fig.2) and Zoran Kanlić (Fig.3), 1992–1996.**





**Fig. 4. Protected and semi-underground pedestrian paths during the war (left). Photograph by Miguel Ruiz.**



**Fig. 5. Documenting of the life in between overground and underground level of the city. Photograph by Zoran Kanlić (Fig. 5), 1992–1996.**



**Fig. 6. Urban garden in the Marijn Dvor neighbourhood. Photographs by Miguel Ruiz, 1992–1996.**



**Fig. 7. Self-made objects for cooking and heating (right).**

**Fig. 8. Human power transportation objects (right). Photographs by Zoran Kanlić, 1992–1996.**





**Fig. 9 sniper and shell protection constructions (left).**

**Fig. 10 interior lighting in the evening (right). Photographs by Miguel Ruiz, 1992–1996.**



*Documenting the war – redesigns for the city and redesigning the city*

By analysing the various images of the war and the image-making activities conducted during the war, we can begin to comprehend a fragmented urban territory: ruined, empty, non-defined spaces, which contain structures and objects made by accident and for temporary uses, constructed in emergent circumstances, where spaces and materials are disintegrated. In disaster circumstances, as during the war in Sarajevo, urban changes are rapid, unpredictable, and difficult to control.

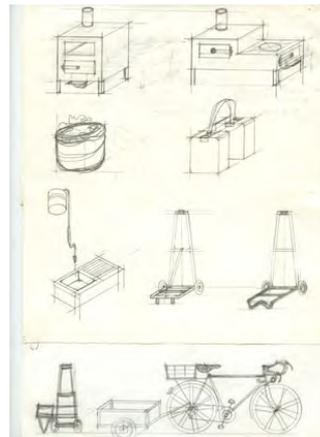
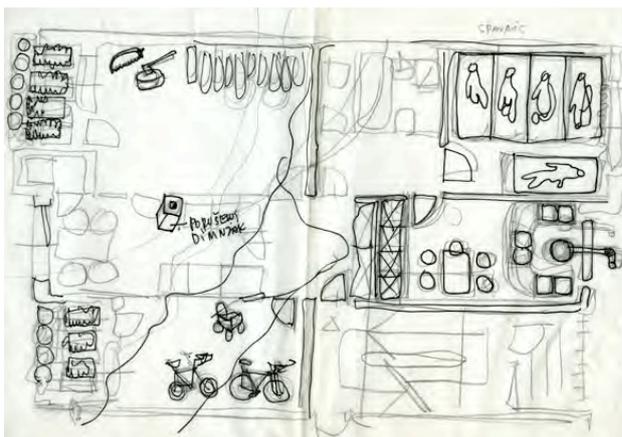
As a consequence, the well-established planning and design practices employed by the Yugoslavian government, its planners, state-building companies, public officials and most of the state-supported architects to control urban transformations in Sarajevo ceased to work. Architects and planners accustomed to working in official plans and prints began operating in an imagined and ever-changing world, hidden in their flats and shelters. Several architects were rethinking urban and architectural space, starting from the actual war socio-spatial emergency—building from and with the ruins and attending to the survival needs of citizens. On the other hand, others architects were looking straight to the post-war future, already proposing reconstructions of the existing buildings, and even proposing new structures. In his proposal for the exhibition *Sarajevo Dream and Reality*, dating from 20<sup>th</sup> December 1993, architect Zoran Doršner writes:

Proposal of a theme for an exhibition in New York: To present like a realistic caricature a graphic representation of the typical floor plan of a flat from the newer series of social housing in the scale 1:10 with an emphasis on the metamorphosis of the flat's interior during the war, including the details of wartime design for dwelling.

Doršner's architectural work made during the war contains texts, journal articles and working sketches, such as free-hand overlapped drawings of the socio-spatial changes



taking place in individual residential units from pre-war to war conditions (Fig. 11); and the civilian rescue equipment used for survival during the siege (Fig. 12). From above listed materials he produced more detailed drawings for the New York exhibition, and also included an image of the partially-destroyed building facade of a typical socialist apartment building (Fig. 13); the floor plan of the residential unit before wartime changes (Fig. 14); the floor plan of the residential unit with the wartime changes (Fig. 15); and drawings of the civilian rescue equipment as in the Fig. 12, but adding more objects (Fig. 16). From Doršner's drawings of the floor plans in the Fig. 14 and 15, we can perceive aspects of citizens' everyday life during the war in urban conditions, how the pre-war use of the flat has been changed to include new, necessary functionality: wood and water storage; redesigning urban elements, such as terrace garden, sand-bag protection wall; and objects designed using what materials was available at-hand inside the apartment, such as a cooking and heating stove.



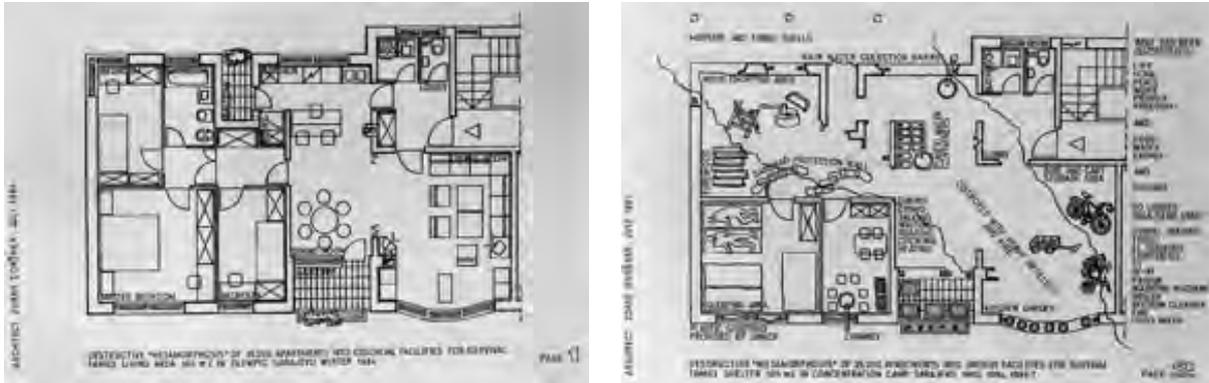
**Fig. 11. Sketches of the residential unit, documenting the transition from pre-war to wartime living conditions (left).**

**Fig. 12. Sketches of the wartime design for civilian rescue equipment (right). Working sketches by architect Zoran Doršner, 1993.**





**Fig. 13. Image of the partially destroyed building facade of a typical socialist apartment building. Photograph by Zlatan Filipović, 1993.**



**Fig. 14. Floor plan of the residential unit before wartime changes (left).**

**Fig. 15. Floor plan of the residential unit with the wartime changes (right). Drawings by architect Zoran Doršner, 1994.**



**Fig. 16. Objects designed using what materials was available at-hand in the apartment. Drawing by architect Zoran Doršner, 1994.**

*Documenting the war – photographs of the city and photographing the city*

The Bosnian war and the siege of Sarajevo was the subject of international attention due to the work of local media operators and those from all over the world who were stationed in Sarajevo, producing sensational images depicting civilians injured by sniper bullets, or flaming, bombarded buildings. Contrary to the usual focus on the photography production of “disturbing photographs” (Sontag, 2003), this paper considers and analyses the material destruction of the city and citizens’ response to the war emergency from a selection of photos made by photographers Kanlić and Ruiz. Both were documenting interior, intimate living spaces and significant material changes of the publicly open and collectively shared spaces between Sarajevo citizens, such as streets and protected green areas (Fig. 2-11). Analysing these photos, I found that they documented the same or similar objects and



spatial adaptations to those that architect Doršner drew. Ruiz's documented wartime gardens (Fig. 6) that citizens made on the green areas in between their housing blocks where during peacetime there had been city parks; people waiting in lines for humanitarian aid (Fig. 17); families growing vegetables on their terraces (Fig. 18), and many other survival tactics. Kanlić in Fig. 7 documented how people, who were living in multistorey, modern-dwelling buildings that had been constructed without chimneys, created openings in their walls in order to install the fume exhausts for an aluminium box stove on the window that they used for heating and cooking. In Fig. 19 and 20, he documented acts of cultural resistance to the siege, such as a concert at the music academy in a room riddled with holes from shelling and an art exhibition installed in the burned central post-office.



**Fig. 17. Waiting in line for humanitarian aid (left).**

**Fig. 18. Growing vegetables on the terrace (right).**

**Photographs by Miguel Ruiz, 1992–1996.**



**Fig. 19. Concert at the music academy in the room with the wholes from shelling (left).**

**Fig. 20. Art exhibition in the burned main post-office (right). Photographs by Zoran Kanlić, 1992–1996.**



*Documenting the war – videos of the city and videographing the city*

“I would like to ask you, if you have the possibility, invite all citizens who own video cameras to use them, and to prepare filmed material, as that material will certainly have its effect.” From the documentary film, *Do you Remember Sarajevo?*, 2002, min: 2:30–2:44.



**Fig. 21. Dragan Vikić invitation for citizens to film from their windows the war in their neighbourhoods.**

**Source: Documentary film capture: *Do you Remember Sarajevo*, min: 2:30 – 2:44.**

In 1992, when war in Bosnia had just begun, in that time a commander of the police special forces Dragan Vikić (Fig. 21) during a TV news broadcasting, implored Sarajevo residents to film from their windows the war transpiring in their neighborhoods.<sup>8</sup> Many citizens did film their city during the war, no doubt some of them directly heeding Vikić’s call. In 1996, Sead and Nihad Kreševljaković began collecting and reviewing such filmic materials and made a video archive of 500 hours of amateur-videos, all in different video formats, quality, duration and made by different citizen-authors. Together with a friend Nihad Alikadić, the Kreševljakovića used this archive to create the documentary film *Do You Remember Sarajevo?*, which was completed and first shown in 2002. That same year, the weekly magazine *Dani* (Days) interviewed the documentarians and reported, “about one hour of remembering the times which had conquered pride, where just like in the movie, all emotions had been combined: horror, suffering, humor, everything what has touched the besieged city, creating a unique atmosphere in the history of the world.” In the interview, the filmmakers explained that the movie doesn’t show a single story of one or more main characters and their lives. On the contrary, it attempts to represent every citizens and his or her life during the war. Moreover, according to Nihad Kreševljaković, from 500 hours of video materials, anyone could make a different movie. The amateur videos showed citizens filming from their windows the bombing of the city during the day and night, the compact city



turning into a ruin, the citizens' architectural adaptations of the interior spaces to the wartime living conditions, soldiers moving in and around the city, wartime design inventions, and even entertaining moments during the war. The filmmakers also note that for this documentary, instead of actors, the video camera is in the foreground. As a medium, a film captures moving images, and thus preserves the condition of the man who is filming, in this case, the rhythms and tensions of the living in the wartime city. Since videos were made by many authors, different video formats were used: 70mm, 35mm, super 16, 16mm, super 8, 8mm, betacam sp, mini DV, etc. I argue that film and video in relation to the discipline of urbanism centered on the extreme urban context – war destruction and as consequence fast urban transformations are highly relational media. By compiling such various media, collected over the duration of the war, the documentary is able to show how the forms and uses of space change over time during the war. The film captures intimate, individual wartime experiences of the filmed people and their related urban environments, a series of spontaneous everyday moments. In addition, 'Do you remember Sarajevo?' is interesting as the media research tool: as an example of collective film making, as evidence of shared documentation of extreme urban transformations, as an "intellectual instrument" (Ulmer, 2004) for academic research about wartime cities, and finally as a visual reading of the complex urban terrain.

## **Conclusion**

When the war destruction begins, simultaneously begins the processes of the rescaling the urban habitat through citizens' various, innovative reimaginings of their homes. Relying on this fact, I initiated my research on the war architectural and urban resilience in Sarajevo via the analysis of the single, mid-size family residential unit using architect Doršner drawings, because in wartime everything that happens actually unfolds within that limited area. While the city still somehow functioned as such, most of the functions of its residents were circumscribed within the four walls of their apartments. This compressed space represents the material base for the social-spatial reproduction of Sarajevo and its territory during the war. In my view, the idea of destructive metamorphosis proposed by Doršner represents a complex documenting process of the death of the city, its reconstruction, reproduction of space and life in the same time through "metamorphic process" not unlike the one proposed by Goethe that has the ability of "going backward as well as forward" (Miller, 2009). Beside a relevant documenting example of the war destruction of the city and architecture, Doršner drawings shows how interior spaces and each object "was an adaptation of some already existing object, partially changing its original shape and giving it a new and different use as well" (Pilav, 2012). From this process of the construction-



destruction-reconstruction of the city during the war, new images emerged of the future of Sarajevo. In addition, Doršner perceived the war experience of Sarajevo as a model for future studies of cities experiencing analogous conditions. In his exhibition text, he writes: “Documenting is terrifyingly didactic for the eventual new subjects at the faculties of law, philosophy, political sciences, architecture—about civilian resistance against the endangerment of elementary rights to life, freedom, peace, home, privacy, culture, religion, universal human rights, and achievements of civilization. This experience may also serve for a new section of the famous encyclopedia for architectural standards of Ernst Neufert, a tragic section of the book dedicated to the elementary survival of cities and civilizations that are under the process of deliberate destruction” (Doršner, 1994). Although in 1991 the World Wide Web had already been introduced,<sup>9</sup> and the war in Sarajevo started the following year, the conflict was documented using old media formats: texts, fax machines, photographs, hand drawings, journals, and video. Wars of today are documented and their images dispersed using both old and new media, such as web mapping, 3D models, interactive web sites, smart phones as “witness devices” (Lovink, 2011), making images and videos using the built-in camera that often are uploaded at the moment of filming to YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, other social networks, or individual blogs. According to Stephen Graham (2010), “the invasion of Iraq in 2003 ‘was the first war to emerge in the electronic informational space as a fully coordinated “media spectacle.”” In addition, the commercial news media have appropriated their own digital simulations of cities and spaces where wars are happening (Graham, 2010). Note that evident technological and electronic advancement of the contemporary warfare is hardly contributing to the documenting and understanding of how citizens are adapting to wartime urban conditions. In war Sarajevo, citizens’ resilient practices were changing architecture day by day, in its form and functions, while introducing spatial ephemerality and different architectural aesthetics through reparation of ruins, grenades holes, and adding of new architectural elements (i.e. sand bags, water collectors, metal sheets from cars). Each building has been transformed, and some trivial or hidden functions of it – staircases or underground storages became safe zones for everyday life reproduction based on collectivity and solidarity among citizens. “It is difficult to consider that urban resilience could be a universal concept. It can vary depending on national policies, disaster history, and security priorities of every country” (Pilav, 2012), but I argue that resilient practices devised by citizens experiencing one war may be useful for those suffering in other conflict zones and contexts. Therefore, collective documenting of the war in the city is highly important image-making process to capture the evidence of war. Analyzing documents from the Sarajevo war shows “radical transformations” (Lebbeus, 1997) by the people who are facing the war everyday with their survival tactics and production of the



patterns<sup>10</sup> of urban resilience within single spaces and the city reconfiguring war urban situation through local cases. In relation to this, I assumed that the pattern of urban resilience is combination of creative and innovative spatial practices found in everyday life, social rules and values, and adaptive thoughts on disaster risk within that specific urban environment (Pilav, 2012). The local instance becomes the scene of change (Ulmer, 2004). Finally, what is possible to learn from the collective knowledge about the war in Sarajevo is not reduced to a media laboratory of sampling, coping, juxtaposing, and recycling of physical and cultural war urban materials. On the contrary, Sarajevo has been a field for forced spatial experimentation, difficult life experience and inventive praxis that today, after the almost twenty years after the war, can continue to be ground for the production of common and “relational knowledge” (Sartre, 2004) that later can be compared with and often employed using the same or similar survival tactics within some other extreme urban situation of war or natural disaster.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/verbs.htm>, [accessed 14<sup>th</sup> April 2015].

<sup>2</sup> Gregory L. Ulmer in his text “*A-Mail: Differential Imaging*” (2004, p.125) sees disaster (not specified which) and homelessness as a method, as a subject to learn from it. “Such is the method: homelessness is not something to explain”.

<sup>3</sup> The term has been used and ideated by the architect Zoran Doršner in his proposal for the exhibition ‘Sarajevo Dream and Reality’ which was set up for the 1995 show at the Storefront for Art and Architecture gallery in New York. Urbanists, architects and students of architecture from Sarajevo that were working on their ideas and projects during the war took part with their projects in this exhibition, which was organized by Association of Architect of Sarajevo.

<sup>4</sup> FAMA (“report” in Latin) is an independent production company founded in the prewar period, worked primarily in audio and video media. It was the organization that produced the Sarajevo Survival Guide and Sarajevo Survival Map. Survival Guide was written in Sarajevo between April of 1992 and April of 1993. The contributors of the Sarajevo Guide are: Miroslav Prstojević (text), Željko Puljić (photos), Nenad Dogan (design), Maja Razović (editor), Aleksandra Wagner (editor and translator), Ellen-Elias Bursać (translator). The contributors of the Sarajevo Survival Map are Suada Kapić (author), Ozren Pavlović (graphic designer/illustrator), Drago Resner (photographer), Nihad Kresevljakovic (text author), Emir Kasumagić (editor), and Vanja Matković (translator). Today FAMA is registered as FAMA International and FAMA Collection represents a virtual bank of knowledge dedicated to the Siege of Sarajevo 1992–1996.

<sup>5</sup> To see creation of the video messages and the war design inventions watch documentary film “A Sarajevo diary-From bad to worse”. Author of the film is William Tribe who taught at the Sarajevo University for twenty-six years, until the war started.

<sup>6</sup> My reference for the Goethe’s *Metamorphosis of Plants* is the book by Gordon L. Miller, who in his book made introduction and photography of the plants mentioned by Goethe in his original book. Miller for the English translation of it choose translation by Douglas Miller, which is contained in Volume 12 of Goethe’s *Collected Works* published by Suhrkamp.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metamorphosis>.

<sup>8</sup> This is my interpretation. He didn’t precise in his invitation to the citizens what to film.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Berners-Lee, a computer programmer in Switzerland introduced World-wide Web.

<http://www.history.com/topics/inventions/invention-of-the-internet>.

<sup>10</sup> In my article ‘Before the War, War, After the War: Urban Imageries for Urban Resilience’ (2012) published in International Journal of Disaster Risk Science, I introduced the concept of the “pattern of urban resilience” crossing the analysis I made of the citizens resilient practices in war Sarajevo and theory about patterns written by: Christopher Alexander et all ‘A Pattern Language’ (1997), Paola Viganò ‘Elementary City’ (1999), and Miloš Bobić article in Archis magazine ‘A Timless Pattern Language. On the Translation of a Pattern Language’ (1996). Article is free for download: <http://link.springer.com/search?query=armina+pilav&search-within=Journal&facet-journal-id=13753>.